

## Meeting Report

# When the Body Forgets to Heal

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*When the Body Forgets to Heal: An Integrative Approach to Reactivating the Healing Response* was hosted by the Association of Complementary Physicians of British Columbia (ACPBC), in Victoria, British Columbia during May 27–29, 2005. The ACPBC should be congratulated for putting together such a well-organized event and for ensuring the weather in beautiful Victoria was nothing short of fantastic.

The ACPBC ([www.acpbc.org](http://www.acpbc.org)) is a group of retired or practicing medical doctors, medical students and medical residents in Canada with a specific expertise or general interest in complementary health care or integrative medicine. The mission of the ACPBC is the advancement of excellence in holistic patient care, by promoting professional development of physicians through the exchange of ideas, research and continuing education, and by disseminating information and providing education to health professionals, students and the public. The conference was a step towards learning more about integrative healing and its role as a component of health care in Canada.

The conference began with a sold-out (intended to be public) keynote address from Dr Andrew Weil: *The Healing Focus of Integrative Medicine*. Other keynotes were provided by Dr Gabor Maté (*When the Body Says No: The Mind/Body Unity in Health*); Dr Leanna Standish and Dr. Marja Verhoef (*Integrative Medicine Research: Canadian and American Perspectives*); and Dr. Steven Aung (*Metta, Karuna, Saydana, Upekkha and Mudita: The Most Powerful Healing Energies*). Keynotes were supplemented by a series of concurrent workshops and two panel presentations: *Educating a New Generation of Physicians* and *A New Partnership for Healing: The Patient-Doctor Relationship in the Integrative Medicine of the Future*. Finally, a reception on Saturday night at the

Royal BC Museum was just one of many networking opportunities provided for delegates, and was a unique opportunity to visit one of Victoria's treasures.

## From a Researcher's Perspective (LV and MV)

The conference was a welcome change to other practice-based conferences attended in the past. The atmosphere was non-hierarchical and very friendly. It seemed as if all delegates welcomed introductions and indeed many new connections were made. It was clear that there is a lot of energy within individuals working in this field and a strong desire to find a place for complementary and integrative medicine in the Canadian health care system.

The keynote presentations were the highlight of the conference. In an energizing and entertaining manner, Dr Maté proposed a hypothesis that certain personality traits contribute to illness through physiological stress. His presentation provided pause to many in the room who work excessive hours and strive to please others, often at the expense of their own health. Regrettably, Drs Standish and Verhoef's address was interrupted by audio-visual troubles at the end of a very busy first conference day; however, the content of their presentation kept the attention of many delegates who strive for evidence-based practice and who wanted to understand the current state and future of complementary and integrative medicine research in North America. Dr Aung's address was, as usual, given to an attentive and overflowing auditorium. He reminded us all of the compassion and thoughtfulness we need to apply in our every day lives, at work and play.

It was unfortunate that workshops, which were not very interactive and ranged in quality, did not offer much for the researcher, as most were practice-focused; however, obviously an understanding of complementary and integrative medicine practice is essential before valid research in this field may be done. The lack of fit between practice-focused workshops and researchers is one example of the most salient theme, to us, throughout the conference: the link between complementary

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and integrative medical practice and research in Canada is weak. Practitioners and researchers still speak such different languages, and in an emerging and demanding field there is little time to devote to understanding each other. This effort will need to be made however, if evidence-based complementary and integrative medicine is ever to move forward. We are hopeful that associations, such as the ACPBC, and the many other complementary and integrative research and practice associations across Canada, are what are needed to begin this much needed dialogue.

The only negative thing about this conference, from our perspective, was the abundance of advertising and free product giveaways throughout the conference. Of course such sponsorship was required to host such an elaborate event; however, this concept, which seems to be borrowed from conventional medical conferences, did not seem appropriate for a discipline that ideally would support and promote small, medium and large product organizations on the basis of a sound product and not the size of sponsorship or advertising budgets. Perhaps some of the entertaining 'extras' could be eliminated to reduce the need for such sponsorship. It was, after all, the content and the people that made this such a memorable conference.

### From a Medical Student Perspective (AS and EB)

As students just finishing our first year within 'the system', this conference was not only academically interesting, it was also personally inspiring. The event brought together a diversity of complementary and alternative medicine practitioners as well as physicians practicing integrative medicine. Learning about their varied practices and perspectives was profoundly encouraging. Conference organizers provided many valuable opportunities for medical students to network, including a luncheon with the keynote speakers, and happily the conversations we engaged in were fascinating and sincere, not in the least bit touched by the superficiality that often characterizes 'networking'. We made many contacts that may provide interesting future elective opportunities for us, and our peers.

The keynote speakers provided superlative presentations, and the panel on the education of new physicians was especially relevant to us. Speakers discussed how medical schools have an obligation to be socially accountable to the values of the public, necessitating the teaching of complementary and alternative medicine, both because of safety concerns and the need for shared decision making. In concrete terms, it was suggested that the medical curriculum should incorporate teaching on nutrition, commonly used botanicals, an introduction to mind-body medicine (which was adeptly discussed by Dr Maté in his keynote address), and the regulations and legalities surrounding integrative medical practice. Additionally,

with evidence-based medicine being the standard of the day, the need to educate students about conceptions of 'evidence' that differ from the traditional model of randomized controlled trials was noted as an important step in encouraging future physicians to accurately assess research on complementary and alternative therapies. While our current curriculum touches on some of these topics, we were inspired to continue to push for the inclusion of more holistic teaching in modern medical schools.

There was a wide diversity of workshop sessions to choose from, although we found that the presentations we attended paled in comparison with the keynotes. In some sessions hosted by complementary and alternative practitioners, we were reminded of the division that has often colored relations between alternative and conventional physicians, and were inspired to help build a future characterized by cooperation and respect. The presentations on consciousness- or energy-based medicine were especially interesting, and we will watch as research in this field continues to reveal the power of intention and its role in healing.

On a personal note, we felt that the conference excelled in communicating its intended message because we were empowered to believe that not only will we be physicians, but we can also be healers. The fact that each person needs only to facilitate the development and expression of his or her inherent healing abilities was encouraging. Furthermore, the role patients can play in teaching physicians about courage, truth and the nature of illness was a reminder that our lives as physicians will be deeply enriched and endlessly interesting if we maintain an attitude of humility and a desire to learn from our patients.

### Summary

Although not every aspect of the conference could be enjoyed by all delegates, there was clearly something for everyone and the conference was without a doubt relevant to newcomers to the field of integrative medicine. Realistically, it may not be currently possible to host a meaningful conference for both practitioners and researchers—although it is clear that there is a strong interest in complementary and integrative medicine in Canada, by practitioners, researchers, policy makers and patients. The fact that *When the Body Forgets to Heal* was a sold-out conference is only one indicator of that interest, another indicator is the numerous advantages taken by conference delegates to network and move forward this agenda in Canada. This conference was a good step towards strengthening the research-practice link by providing a forum for practitioners and researchers to network. It was inspiring, motivational and very timely. In our collective opinion, this conference would make a worthwhile annual event.